

Tough Times Never Lasts But Tough People, Like Emon, Do.

Everyone talks about the struggles and sacrifices an elder daughter makes in a typical family in Bangladesh. What about a younger one? If you ask my teachers or college classmates about how I am? They would probably describe me as a girl who is depressed all the time. But I know myself as a strong one, and I have a tale that I've never shared before. I lost my mother at the tender age of 17 and lost my father too a few months ago. Losing them made a deep wound in my heart that saddened me.

But my childhood was fun! We did not have luxury but we did not see poverty either. My father was a retired army sergeant, who used to work in Asian Energy. With his salary and pension, we lived comfortably. In 2016 he suffered from a heart attack. The doctors said it was a second one; he had a minor heart attack earlier. Suddenly his physical condition started degrading and he had to stop working. With the savings and his pension, we, a family of four, were surviving somehow. But the situation got worse when my mother had a brain stroke in 2019. My father sold all our lands and used all his savings to take her to Apollo India to make sure she gets better treatment.

Responsibility is a term that I learned at a very early age! Back then I was an SSC candidate. My elder sister was an HSC candidate and she said her studies were more difficult. She had admission tests at that time. Everyone wanted her to just focus on her studies so I had to keep my studies aside. The other responsibilities of the home automatically came on my shoulders. I used to cook food for my entire family during weekends and store them in the fridge. On weekdays I used to go to school, and study. Those days were insanely hectic but I managed to concentrate on my studies somehow. After continuing a few months like this, my mother died. All those expensive medicines from India were of no use. I felt all my hard work was in vain. I was emotionally shattered. And I could not get good results in my SSC exam. My elder sister too ended up admitted in a national university.

After SSC I got admitted to college and started living in a dorm to focus on my studies. I was attending classes, private tutoring, and studying for my HSC. For any Bangladeshi rural girl, the intermediate college experience is difficult. And due to COVID-19, my path became more difficult. With my strong determination, I have achieved a comparatively better result in HSC and started preparing for the admission tests. On 3 June, I attended the admission test at Dhaka University accompanied by my father. On my way back home I was thinking it would be really nice if I get a chance there. On 4 June, at around 3 pm my father had another heart attack. And he died on the way to the hospital. It was all of a sudden and I was completely in shock. It was probably the most difficult time of my life. Forget about attending university admission tests of universities, I could not eat or sleep properly during that time!

I moved to my Uncle's place and I was trying to restart my life. They are quite nice and generous people. However, no one had time to accompany me for traveling to different divisions of Bangladesh for the admission test. I did not have a good preparation for the tests, I did not have enough money to buy the admission form, or travel to places. Everyone thought supporting me would be a waste of time and money. I have also attended a combined university exam that they offer in all colleges. And only a limited number of students get a chance there and I didn't get it.

My last hope to continue my study at a university was Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur. When I went there to attend the test, I saw a female teacher who was guarding the center. She was a bold, confident, and young woman. The way she was controlling the participants and not allowing them to cheat was remarkable. That's quite unusual in our area of Rangpur. Because in my college, I have seen female teachers feel very uncomfortable teaching in class. The boys of the class make it difficult for them. Be it Biology or any other subject, for boys' tease and make so much noise in class. Sometimes the female teachers had to finish the class early or call the principal to control them. But when I saw this female teacher, her ability to fulfill her duty with such grace! I told myself I want to be like her. Yes, I want to become a teacher like her.

A few days passed, and I could not pass any of the tests. Some of my relatives were suggesting to marry me off. They said I was being a burden to my uncle's family since I could not get a chance to continue my studies. To save me from early marriage, my sister told me to enroll in a national university, but that was never my choice. I could not imagine going back to those colleges. With the poor quality education there, I knew for sure that if I studied there, it would be nearly impossible for me to be established and self-dependent in my life. My uncle and aunt were supportive and told me to take off this year and prepare for next year's exam. And I was trying to remain patient and pray to the Creator, to open a door for me.

My aunt is a teacher at Bangabandhu College. I saw a light of hope when my aunt said her college principal had received an amazing opportunity for their female students to get admitted in the Asian University for Women. They will visit here for the admission test and if a student gets selected, they will give a full-scholarship for tuition fees and living expenses. On top of that, they will secure a job as a college teacher position for the selected students' right after graduation. This offer sounded unreal to me, as I never heard about this university before!

But I started searching online resources and came to know more details about this university. Its mission to support women from different countries from vulnerable situations amazed me. I expressed deep interest to get a chance to at least sit for this admission test. My aunt agreed and requested the principal to keep my name on the list of their students. The next day, the officials from AUW called me to register and told me about the written test. The test date approached, and I was trying to prepare my best for this one. After the written test I received a call for the interview. This interview will be in English and I was panicking. But it went well and everyone was so cooperative.

Within a very short period, I have received a confirmation from AUW. This was all of a sudden but I knew I was on my toes for it. I traveled from the northern side to the Southern side of Bangladesh. It was such a long journey of 13 hours. But when I took my first step inside of this university I saw the students of different nationalities, and the environment felt safe to me. I realized I made the right decision. I do not feel homeless or orphaned anymore. I was thinking maybe this is something good happening to me after such a long time. Or maybe the prayers of my late parents that made this dream come true!

My parents could not support me when I needed their guidance to select a college, or to select a career path. But they used to consider me as a more mature person and they had a belief that I am a fighter and I will shine even with a little support. They always told me that no matter what! I need to establish! No matter where they are! Today I am here to make their dream a reality. I believe after my graduation I will be confident enough to become a female role model and inspire more girls from my village.



This life story is about Effat Ara Emon. 20-year-old girl from a middle-class family. She was born and brought up in Fulbari, a village of Rangpur. Her hobbies are traveling and cooking.

[About the author](#)

Nujhat Jahan is working as a Research Assistant for the In-Service Master of Education (M.Ed.) Program at Asian University for Women